

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**



REPRESENTATIVE JASON ROJAS
HOUSE MAJORITY LEADER

Chairs Moore and Luxenberg, Ranking Members Scott and Sampson, Vice-Chairs Khan and Lesser, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of **H.B. 6781**, AN ACT ADDRESSING HOUSING AFFORDABILITY FOR RESIDENTS IN THE STATE.

Thank you for raising this bill and continuing our efforts to provide fair housing to all of our citizens.

We are all fortunate to live in Connecticut. As a state, we are rated highly for quality of life, good schools, safe communities, and economic opportunity. People want to live here. Unfortunately, we have a housing crisis in our state.

Our policies and politics have made it difficult to produce a diversity of housing that meets the needs of a population that is increasingly diverse in numerous ways, such as income, age, disability, race and ethnicity. Restrictions on the development of multifamily housing and affordable single-family homes perpetuate economic and racial isolation and limit housing choice for young professional, first-time home buyers, the elderly, those with mobility limits, and families of all kinds, especially working poor families.

The lack of housing for workers in certain communities severely limits their ability to work in that community, which reduces the economic vitality of the community. A lack of workers, a feature of our current economy for many businesses, results when workers lack the ability to reach potential jobs because there is not housing for them in or near the community with the jobs. Without housing for all types of workers in every community, our economy suffers.

In addition, a lack of affordable housing in communities that offer economic opportunity perpetuates historical patterns of segregation and lack of equity that we, as a matter of principle, have long rejected. If we do not take action to remedy the effects of those patterns, however, our rejection of those principles is meaningless. We have a moral obligation, if we truly reject the mistakes of the past, to take action now to remedy their lasting effects.

H.B. 6781 proposes to further fair housing in Connecticut in multiple ways. First, it asks us all to step forward and do more. It recognizes this increased obligation, however, by offering rewards and lightened burdens as a counterbalance.

For example, the bill asks landlords to modify their application process but it also creates a pilot program to pay grants to landlords who hold units open for applicants with vouchers, creates an exemption from the conveyance tax for affordable housing deed-restricted properties, and requires the state to spend more of its available affordable housing voucher funds. The bill also asks the state to develop a common application for all affordable housing programs and to study

the efficiency of the application process, with a focus on the inspection process, in order to shorten the time it takes for a vouchered tenant to be able to be approved to occupy a unit.

The bill asks municipalities to submit a plan, in lieu of the current affordable housing plan, that includes development of affordable housing, but that also plans how to overcome patterns of segregation and lack of equity and opportunity because of public and private policies and practices. To assist with the development of this plan, municipalities will be able to work with the Office of Responsible Growth, which will develop a town specific data set with demographic information related to segregation.

The bill also creates a voluntary opportunity for municipalities to earn additional points towards a section 8-30g moratorium if they choose to amend their zoning ordinances to allow the development of middle housing as of right within a quarter mile of a transit district.

Finally, the bill redirects additional funds to affordable housing, to make real the state's commitment to creating fair and diverse housing for all its residents.

The bill redirects conveyance tax received by the state over \$180 million per year to the Housing Trust Fund.

It creates a bond fund of \$75 million for grants-in-aid for construction and renovation costs for conversion of hotels, malls, and office buildings to multifamily dwellings in non-distressed municipalities.

It appropriates an additional \$20 million per year for Coordinated Access Networks.

The amount was unintentionally left blank in section 37, but the intent is to appropriate an additional \$10 million per year for the General Rental Assistance Program.

The bill appropriates an additional \$2 million per year for 2-1-1.

It appropriates an additional \$5 million per year for diversionary and flexible housing programs.

It appropriates \$250,000 to OPM for FY24 to hire a consultant to develop model codes for municipalities.

It appropriates \$5 million per year to COGs for development of regional housing inspection programs.

It appropriates \$5m for FY24 for the landlord relief pilot program mentioned above.

In short, this bill represents a comprehensive attempt to attack a problem that threatens the economy of the state, a problem that unfairly limits the opportunity and quality of life of certain segments of our society, a problem that we all have long had an obligation to remedy. The bill asks us all to accept responsibility for the problem of our lack of fair housing, but it also recognizes the burdens that it may impose and attempts to counterbalance them.

I urge the committee to move the bill forward, recognizing that other folks will offer suggestions for improvement and that it will no doubt undergo change as it moves through the legislative process. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J-Rj', with a stylized 'J' and 'R' connected by a horizontal line.

Jason Rojas